

EPISTEMOLOGY — HOW WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW

Epistemology is the study of the theory of knowledge.

Epistemology asks **questions** like: 'What is knowledge?', 'How is knowledge acquired?', 'What do people know?', 'What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge?', 'What is its structure, and what are its limits?', 'What makes justified beliefs justified?'

ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

Means of acquiring knowledge

People acquire knowledge using the following means:

1. The rational faculty
2. The five basic senses
3. Intuition or knowledge associated with the heart and spirit.

Sources of knowledge

These are also three-fold:

1. The universe, including the heavens, the earth, and the natural world.
2. Man – including what is within ourselves, i.e., the above-mentioned faculties, as well as that taught by Prophets and other people, both present and past.
3. God's Revelation in the form of scriptures and inspiration to individuals.

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Consider these verses of the Qur'an:

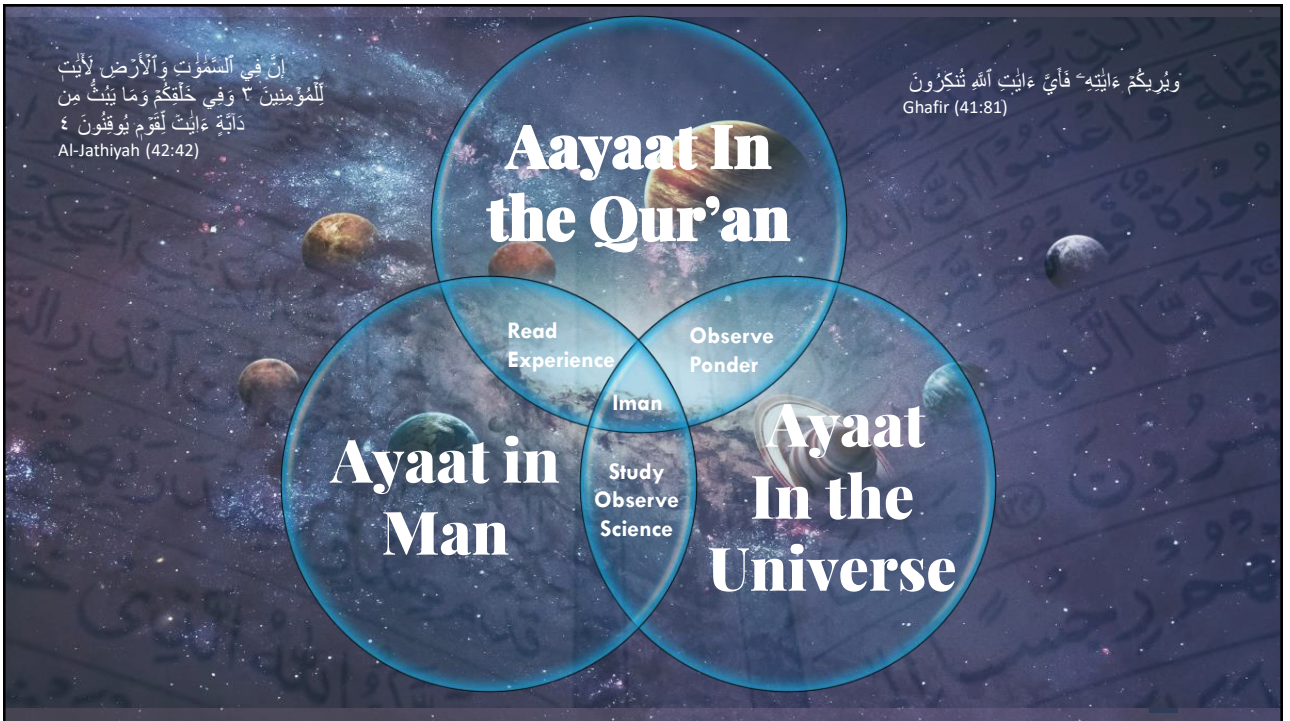
Say [Prophet], 'Have you ever thought, what if this revelation really is from God and you still reject it? Who could be more astray than someone who cuts himself off so far [from God]?'

"We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?"

Truly, they doubt that they will meet their Lord; truly He encompasses everything."

Surah Fussilat 41: 52-54

One way to look at this is to think of the universe and ourselves as alternative forms of **scripture** which contain *ayaat* (verses and signs) in the same way that actual scripture like the Qur'an does.



حم (1) تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ (2) إِنَّ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
 لَآيَاتٍ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ (3) وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُتُّ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ آيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ (4)
 وَاجْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ رِزْقٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ
 بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَّاحِ آيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ (5) تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا
 عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ (6)

“This Scripture is sent down from Allah, the Mighty, the Wise.

There are signs in the heavens and the earth for those who believe: in the creation of you, in the creatures Allah scattered on earth, there are signs for people of sure faith; in the alternation of night and day, in the rain Allah provides, sending it down from the sky and reviving the dead earth with it, and in His shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason.

These are Allah's signs that We recount to you [Prophet, to show] the Truth. If they deny Allah and His revelations, what message will they believe in?”

Surah al-Jathiyah (45: 1-6)

THE QUR'AN CALLS TO ALLAH'S SIGNS

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